School StatNet Pilot Final Report

Submitted April 15, 2014

Initial Participating Communities

District	Enrollment	Reduced/Free lunch	Accountability	Regional?	Region of State
Advanced Math and Science Academy	997	5%	1	Charter	Central
Amherst-Pelham	1,478	27%	2	Yes	Berkshire
Ashland	2,581	12%	2	No	Greater Boston
Attleboro	5,862	39%	2	No	Southeast
Belchertown	2,416	20%	2	No	Pioneer Valley
Boston	54,300	78%	4	No	Commissioner's District
Bourne	2,046	26%	2	No	Southeast
Chicopee	7,779	63%	3	No	Berkshire
Everett	6,906	80%	3	No	Greater Boston
Fall River	10,319	78%	4	No	Commissioner's District
Fitchburg	5,010	77%	3	No	Central
Franklin County Regional Tech	523	47%	2	Yes	Pioneer Valley
Holliston	2,819	6%	2	No	Greater Boston
Hudson	2,947	26%	3	No	Central
Leominster	6,171	48%	3	No	Central
Lowell	14,031	75%	3	No	Commissioner's District
Milford	4,182	32%	2	No	Central
New Bedford	12,744	76%	4	No	Commissioner's District
No Brookfield	566	33%	2	No	Central
Orange-Mahar	819	46%	2	Yes	Pioneer Valley
Revere	6,831	78%	3	No	Greater Boston
Somerset-Berkeley	953	13%	1	Yes	Southeast
Somerville	4,940	67%	3	No	Greater Boston
Sporingfield	25,826	87%	4	No	Commissioner's District
Swampscott	2,293	15%	2	No	Northeast
Waltham	5,155	42%	3	No	Greater Boston
Watertown	2,708	32%	2	No	Greater Boston
Weston	2,333	4%	1	No	Greater Boston
Westborough	3,585	10%	2	No	Central
Westfield	5,814	40%	3	No	Pioneer Valley
Wilmington	3,522	9%	2	No	Northeast
Worcester	24,562	73%	4	No	Commissioner's District

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Somerville Public Schools
Education • Inspiration • Excellence

Dr. Vincent P. McKay, *Assistant Superintendent of Schools*
42 Cross Street • Somerville, MA 02145–3246
vmckay@k12.somerville.ma.us • www.somerville.k12.ma.us
T 617–625–6600 x6035 • **F** 617–666–1130

April 15, 2014

Secretary Glen Shor
Executive Office for Administration and Finance
State House, Room 373
Boston, MA 02133

Dear Secretary Shor:

We are pleased to submit our final report that describes our first year of work on the CIC-funded project "School StatNet Pilot." With this letter, we want to express our most sincere thanks to the Governor, the Executive Office for Administration and Finance, the Massachusetts Senate, and the Massachusetts House for their support of the Community Innovation Challenge Grant program. As we work with municipalities and school districts, we often see opportunities for changes in how we do business that will reduce costs and improve services. However, those changes often require an up-front investment – usually an investment in planning, discussion, and analysis. The CIC Grant program enables us to avoid missed opportunities and makes this up-front investment possible. In doing so, it supports the solutions and systems that will produce both savings and government improvements for years and decades to come.

In our first year of School StatNet implementation, we set out to replicate the successful municipal StatNet program that is run out of the Collins Center at UMass Boston. Our goal was to bring together districts to discuss consolidated data and exchange practices and concerns relating to high-impact issues in education. At three meetings this year, participants engaged in lively discussions about education policy and practices. Participants rated the sessions very highly, with one commenting, for example, that the meeting was "by far the most useful and thought-provoking meeting I have attended in a long time."

During the School StatNet launch, we observed many of the similar benefits observed from the municipal StatNet program. However, we also quickly learned that some key differences exist between municipalities and school districts. Those include the greater importance of State agencies in shaping the local education landscape, the greater strength of professional associations in education, and the huge abundance of education data, particularly as compared to the relative dearth of capacity at all levels to analyze the data.

As a result of these lessons learned, we revised our plans mid-year to focus on adding opportunities to exchange ideas across levels of government through the creation of a State/Local Study team. To involve professional associations, we set out to embed mini School StatNet meetings into the existing meetings of associations. Finally, to address the analytical gap

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throughout the sector, we have committed to pilot the School District Performance Management Program (SDPMP). The SDPMP will provide analytical support to districts with services delivered by a centrally trained and supervised team of analysts housed at the Collins Center.

Thank you again for giving us the opportunity to undertake this important work. We look forward to sharing more lessons learned and success stories as the project continues into 2014-2015.

Sincerely,

Dr. Vince McKay
Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment
Somerville Public Schools

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A combination of partners launched the School StatNet Coalition last spring in an effort to increase opportunities for districts to participate in data-driven discussions of high-impact education policies and strategies. While districts spend a great deal of time analyzing local data to inform decision making at the classroom, school, and district levels, they do not as often have opportunities to talk about data across districts. With the education landscape undergoing so many changes at the moment, district decision makers need opportunities to compare notes and together look for solutions to issues that span districts and hinder student success.

As the core element of the School StatNet program this year, the StatNet team facilitated three very intensive meetings at which district decision makers discussed data on school operations and education practices with other district leaders, with State analysts and officials, and with academics. A total of 32 districts participated in some capacity in meetings, and the participants expressed a high-level of satisfaction with the meetings and a strong interest in continuing them.

The School StatNet program was formed as a replication of the Municipal StatNet program which has been in operation for five years and which brings together municipalities for data-informed discussions of local government practices. With the launch of School StatNet, we became aware of a few differences between the two sectors. Among these: 1. Districts are more impacted by State policy; and 2. The education sector has a stronger infrastructure of professional associations. In our first year, we modified plans along the way to address these two differences. To involve State decision-makers, we committed to launch a State/Local Study Team that will convene representatives from State and local levels to explore data on a high-impact topic. To involve professional associations, we committed to carry out mini School StatNet workshops at meetings of existing associations. Furthermore, we committed to selecting topics and dates for School StatNet meetings at the start of the year in order to avoid scheduling conflicts.

While we learned about differences between the sectors, we also learned a key way that municipal and education sectors are similar – they both need more analytical capacity. To address this identified need, we committed to launch a replication of the Municipal Performance Management Program (MPMP) with districts in the coming year. The new program – School District PMP – will allow analytical staff, centrally recruited, trained, and supervised at the Collis Center, to provide analytical support to participant districts. While districts will receive subsidized services during a trial period, it is our goal to transition districts to cover their cost of services received while also subsidizing the work required to continue StatNet meetings, workshops, and Study Teams. In this way, we expect and hope that the School StatNet project will move towards self-sufficiency in the coming year.

SECTION 1: PARTNER COMMUNITIES

The School StatNet Coalition is a partnership of districts, education-related professional associations, researchers/staff from academia, and analysts/policy-makers from State agencies. In our initial proposal, we had conceived of the primary partners as being districts and researchers. However, as we rolled the program out, we saw benefits of giving a more prominent role to professional associations and State partners.

The School StatNet partners participated in the launch of School StatNet in the following ways.

Local Government Partners:

The original partners signing on to the application included four districts and their associated municipalities (Somerville, Fitchburg, Revere, and Chicopee). These districts are similar in that they are all Level 3 districts, according to the State's accountability status rating system. They all have large populations of low-income students, English Language Learners, and students who receive special education services. The districts came together as their leadership hoped to share ideas so that each could learn from the other. Throughout the launch year, leaders from these communities participated actively in School StatNet Steering Committee calls and meetings. In addition, other districts joined the leadership team. Those additional districts included Springfield, which sent a large team of analysts to each School StatNet meeting, Boston, Everett, Lowell, Wilmington, and Westborough. As School StatNet prepared a proposal to continue its work for a second year, some of these districts (Springfield, Everett, Westborough, and Lowell) joined on as official partners. The districts that will serve as lead partners in the second year include large urban districts, suburban, and rural districts. The group includes both predominantly low-income districts and one that has few low-income students.

Academic Partners:

Two academic partners have been actively involved throughout the launch of School StatNet in its first year.

- Harvard: Harvard sent Sarah Glover, a staff person who manages partnerships for the Harvard Graduate School of Education, to School StatNet meetings. Ms. Glover participated actively and could weigh in with ideas on how to better utilize academic investigation to support issues of concern to practitioners. We also talked at several junctures to the Strategic Data Project (SDP) at Harvard to identify pathways for SDP to become involved with School StatNet. The SDP runs a network of fellows, who work within large districts, state government, and other education organizations to provide analytical support. A number of current SPD fellows have been participating in meetings, since Boston, Springfield, and the Commonwealth all have fellows placed in their organizations. Despite these fellows' participation and though the SDP's mission lines up closely with School StatNet's, we have not yet been able to find a way to fund a larger role for the SPD in School StatNet.

- The Collins Center: The Collins Center at UMass Boston played an active role since the inception of the School StatNet initiative, in large part because of its leadership of the municipal StatNet program, upon which School StatNet has been modeled. The Collins Center helped with each aspect of the launch year, participating in Steering Committee's decision making and helping with planning and meeting coordination.

In addition to these two key partners, a professor from Northeastern presented a segment at the March 28th School StatNet meeting and a researcher from Tufts helped prepare materials for the fall 2013 meeting. Their participation in Steering Committee calls and in meetings brought a unique perspective to the conversation. They were able to talk about how research might support resolution of practitioner dilemmas.

State Partners:

While in our initial proposal we did not establish out a significant role for State partners, throughout the year we increasingly observed the benefit of having both local and State level analysts and decision-makers at the table in any StatNet discussion. The State-level officials have a perspective on issues and possible levers to impact education policy that local decision-makers do not have. Likewise, the State-level officials have expressed their interest in hearing the unique district-level perspectives. In addition, having officials from different State agencies has been useful. Multiple State agencies do work that relates to key education issues, so linking discussions across State agencies while also linking discussions across State and local levels of government helps bring the right people to the table to understand a more complete picture of problems and opportunities. The following State agencies have been actively involved in School StatNet in different roles throughout the year.

- Department of Early Childhood and School-Aged Education (DESE): Through meetings with DESE managers, School StatNet and DESE staff discussed how DESE could be involved in the initiative. Our DESE contacts advised us that the DESE would like to see School StatNet function independently for the most part, as a voice of districts but in close contact with DESE, so that our discussions can help inform DESE policy-making. In addition, DESE managers indicated that they think there is a benefit to adding analytical capacity at different levels of education administration (State, regional, local) to work with the large stores of data that are increasingly available on education service delivery within the Commonwealth. As part of their support for the initiative, DESE has sent staff to School StatNet meetings, including an official who handles the State's District Determined Measures initiative, the State's SDP Fellow, and an official from the research unit who works extensively with financial data.

- Education Secretariat: The Education Secretariat has also been involved in the initiative. The key way that this unit has participated is by sending members of the Edwin development team to School StatNet meetings. Edwin is the State's software system that provides both analytical and student-level data to districts.

- Greater Boston District and School Assistance Center (DSAC): Staff from the Greater Boston DSAC have been very active in helping to guide the initiative. They have participated in planning meetings and School StatNet meetings. At the September meeting, a staff member from the Greater Boston DSAC led a break-out session on how districts can develop metrics for schools. At the March 28th meeting, DSAC staff helped facilitate both the Curriculum and Instruction strand and a lunch-time break-out session on PARCC implementation. This State-funded entity is one of six regional assistance centers that are designed to help districts and their schools think strategically about how to use professional development and targeted assistance to improve instruction and raise student achievement. Because their mission relates closely to School StatNet's, their involvement has been very useful and makes sense.

Professional Associations:

In our initial plan, we did not identified a role for professional associations. This oversight is most likely due to our prior work on the municipal StatNet project. On the municipal side, there are fewer active professional associations, especially in departments such as public works or inspectional services. However, in education, an existing infrastructure of associations regularly brings together leaders to exchange ideas and expertise. Once we understood the importance of the associations, we tried to work closely with them to select topics and recruit participants in meetings. In our first year, we worked with the Massachusetts Association of Regional Schools (MARS) by delivering an embedded workshop at one of their regular meetings. They also helped us plan the spring School StatNet meeting on March 28th and helped recruit participants to the meeting. In addition, we met with leadership from Massachusetts Association of School Business Officials (MASBO) to plan a future embedded workshop at their annual training in the summer. For next year's work, we have as official partners MARS and the Massachusetts Association of School Superintendents (MASS).

A Blend of Curriculum/Instruction and Finance/Operations Participants:

We found that throughout our first year, meetings primarily attracted administrators who work on curriculum and instruction. However, for our third and final meeting, the meeting involved two tracks, with one focused on budgeting processes and decisions and the other on a curriculum and instruction topic. Participants reported that this mix very useful. Going into the second year, we plan to continue to involve administrators who work on business and operations within school districts. Their participation is useful for two primary reasons. First, there are a number of issues (like that of high-level district strategy setting discussed in the third meeting) for which discussions are greatly benefited by having both the operations and content experts in the room. Second, school districts, like municipalities, can benefit greatly from having more analysis done of their operations and finance activities. By comparing notes and digging into these datasets, districts will find opportunities to achieve efficiencies and improve service delivery.

SECTION 2: GOALS

The initial goals of our pilot year implementation were as follows:
1. Build School StatNet network (Convene School StatNet meetings, Consolidate data for analysis)
2. Undertake analytical projects (Carry out analytical projects, Pilot integration of early childhood data)

In general, our focus shifted away from carrying out stand-alone data analysis projects as referenced in the second goal, and more towards convening data-informed meetings that include professional associations and span across levels of government. Ongoing meetings may result in a plan to carry out focused research with consolidated State data. However, we don't expect to know the scope of that plan until at least another year's worth of data-informed meetings have taken place, and until, potentially, we have an academic partner that can help shape the research methodology.

SECTION 3: IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

The School StatNet team undertook the following steps between mid-March 2013 and March 31st, 2014 to launch the project:

March, 2013:
- Finalized the scope of services and contract for School StatNet with A&F.
- Reached out to partners (districts, Greater Boston DSAC, State agencies, and academic partners) to schedule Steering Committee call to plan launch of initiative.

April, 2013:
- Held Steering Committee call with partners to discuss the pilot StatNet meeting's date, topic, and recruitment plan.
- Drafted, revised, and distributed data collection survey for first meeting.
- Reached out to State officials to discuss project.
- Secured space for May meeting and promoted meeting.

May, 2013:
- Analyzed data to prep for meeting.
- Held meeting on "K-5 Interventions for General Education Students"
- Collected feedback from meeting, summarized and posted takeaways, and debriefed with partners.

June, July, and August:
- Held Steering Committee call with partners to select fall StatNet meeting date and topic.
- Drafted, revised, and distributed data collection survey for fall meeting.

September:
- Distributed data collection survey, collected survey results, and prepared for October meeting.
- Worked with State analyst, Erin Dillon, to develop presentation on her research on patterns of placement of at-risk students by teacher seniority.

October:
- Met with DESE Deputy Commissioner to review progress on project.
- Held fall meeting on "Educator Hiring, Induction, PD, and Evaluation".
- Collected feedback from meeting, summarized and posted take-aways, and debriefed with partners.

November:
- Met with DESE officials to provide updates on project progress.
- Drafted Round 2 proposal, which includes a sustainability plan.
- Attended CIC training in Worcester.

December
- Established contract between Somerville Public Schools and the Collins Center to enlist Collins Center staff to carry out some analytical services.

- Held Steering Committee call to discuss State/Local Team pilot meeting and to select a topic for the January and March School StatNet meetings.

January:
- Carried out calls with all School StatNet partners to get feedback.
- Finalized contract with Collins Center.

February
- Held call on "Budget Process and Decision Making".
- Carried out MARS Embedded workshop.
- Attended MASBO meeting to plan for Summer Institute embedded workshop.
- Held Steering Committee call to finalize plans for March meeting.
- Developed data collection survey for March 28th meeting.

March
- Distributed survey, collected and analyzed results, and prepared for March meeting.
- Held spring meeting on "Budget Development and Aligning Curriculum and Instruction to Common Core."
- Collected feedback from meeting and summarized/posted takeaways

SECTION 4: BUDGET

Item	Details	Work Completed	Amount
Coordination and analytical work	Stephanie Hirsch's work for 10 hours/week.	Worked with advisors and districts to develop topics for analysis. Integrated/collected data and analyzed. Prepared materials for meetings and District reports. Provide general oversight and planning for initiative.	$19,026
Collins Center support		Support coordination, analysis, and logistics. Recruit academics to participate in meetings.	$15,500
Meeting space and food.	$1,300/meeting for three meetings	Food and space rental for three meetings	$3,800
Total			$38,326

The budget underwent several changes over the course of the year, including the following:

- The initial budget had three separate lines for academic advisors. Because two of them (Tufts and Harvard) could not easily find a way to accept the funding, we combined those lines and sub-contracted with the Collins Center for their key support of the contract work.

- The initial budget had the total work undertaken in the coordination/analytical line at $27,526. However, we transferred $8,500 of that funding to the Collins Center so that they could carry out more of the work for the second half of the year, in hopes that the project could transition permanently to the Collins Center.

- We transferred an additional $975 into meeting space and food to cover higher-than-expected costs to reserve space.

SECTION 5: CHALLENGES AND SOLUTIONS

During the course of our implementation year, we identified several opportunities that made us rethink our planned strategy. While we adjusted mid-course to implement some of the changes in this first year of School StatNet, some of the lessons learned most impact the plan for the second year of implementation of School StatNet.

The challenges/opportunities and the revised approach that we started to implement this year, are as follows:

1. **Importance of involving State officials:**

While we initially conceived of School StatNet to be a project that facilitates discussions across districts, we learned that discussions across levels of government need to occur at the same time. Because of the key role that the State education agencies play in shaping local priorities, opportunities, and constraints, having State officials in the room has helped provide more depth and scope to discussions of high-stakes (both in terms of funding spent and in terms of life-long impact on children's lives) topics.

Revised strategy in response to challenge/opportunity: While we had originally listed analyzing consolidated State data and preparing reports as goals for the first year, we realized that our focus should be initially on building forums through which State and local officials can exchange ideas on priority issues to lay the groundwork for future analysis. Preliminary exploration of issues will provide more focus and buy-in from key stakeholders for any future analysis of consolidated State data. To advance our revised goal, we have worked on involving State officials in School StatNet meetings and have planned for the creation of a State/Local School StatNet Study Team. The Study Team will carry out an in-depth exploration of a high-impact topic, including a discussion of what State and local levers exist that might be available to make an impact on the issue. Analysts and officials from State agencies and from local government, along with representatives from academia and education-related professional associations, will attend meetings. At a recent planning session, participants selected the following topic as the first that the State/Local Study Team will discuss: "Look into how districts can carry out a ROI analysis to support decision making regarding district investments/strategies, perhaps with a focus on what helps close the achievement gap." An initial meeting will be held this spring, prior to the end of the academic year.

2. **Opportunity to integrate analytical work into existing networks:**

In implementing School StatNet as a replication of the municipal StatNet program, we learned one key difference between the education and municipal sectors. In education, there are more functioning professional associations for district personnel than there are among some of the larger municipal departments, such as public works or inspectional services. In contrast to those departments, where managers less frequently meet to share practices, high-level district administrators more regularly meet to exchange ideas.

Revised strategy in response to challenge/opportunity: Based on these realizations, we began to plan for carrying out abbreviated School StatNet meetings as components of the meetings of existing associations, such as Massachusetts Association of Business Officials (MASBO), MARS, MASS, and the Urban Superintendent's Association. We carried out one embedded workshop at a MARS meeting in February and met with MASBO officials to begin to plan a workshop that will be part of their Summer Institute.

3. **Need for advance scheduling of meetings:**

Perhaps in part because of the existence of active professional associations, we have had a challenge in finding dates/times that don't conflict with other important education-related meetings.

Revised strategy in response to challenge/opportunity: While we did not undertake this strategy this year, going into next year, we hope to establish meeting dates and topics for the 2014-2015 school year in the spring of 2014 and to coordinate those meetings with the calendars of the major professional associations.

SECTION 6: OUTCOMES

Measurement	Status update
20 districts will attend meetings	32 districts either attended meetings or sent data for inclusion in meeting analysis.
75% of participants, as reported through a survey, will report that the meetings were useful or very useful	The average percent of participants reporting that meetings overall and meeting components were useful/very useful, or interesting/very interesting ranged between 75% and 100% and averaged 84.5% across all sessions and meetings.
4 reports will be produced by the analyst for all participating communities that summarize the results across all communities and provide customized versions for each district	While we have summarized lessons learned from each meeting, we have switched focus on this deliverable and instead committed to pilot an embedded workshop and a State/Local Study Team meeting.

75% of participants, as reported through a survey, will report that the analysis is useful or very useful	N/A (see above)
A sustainability plan will be developed in coordination with both districts and state officials.	Our sustainability plan is embedded in the Round 2 proposal. Our plan is to deliver the following products in the second year: Facilitation of 3 School StatNet meetings; Facilitation of 4 workshops embedded in the meetings of professional associations; Facilitation of 4 meetings of a State/Local Study Team; and Launch of a School District Performance Management Program pilot, through which districts will receive analytical services from a central team of analysts supervised at the Collins Center. It is our hope that revenue collected from districts for this last piece – the SDPMP – will ultimately pay for staff who can continue to carry out the other components (meetings, workshops, and study teams), so that the initiative is ultimately self-sustaining.

Revised Outcomes: Based on reflections from the School StatNet meetings and from interviews with stakeholders, we developed a slightly modified set of deliverables. In place of producing stand-alone research reports, we have instead this year worked on creating collaborative efforts to study data. The deliverables that we will complete this year are:

1. **Piloting an Embedded Workshop**: To support existing professional associations in education, we have planned to deliver embedded workshops in the standing meetings of an existing professional association. We carried out a pilot workshop in February at a MARS meeting and we have also met with MASBO to begin to plan an embedded workshop that will be part of their Summer Academy in July.

2. **Convene Study Team**: While the School StatNet meetings have been opportunities for district leaders to exchange ideas, some of the most exciting moments have been exchanges of ideas between State-level administrators and district decision-makers. Early this calendar year, we shifted our focus to commit to establishing a State/Local Study Team, composed of representatives from several districts, professional associations, academia, and State agencies, to discuss data relating to a high-impact issue in education in the Commonwealth. While we had intended to hold one Study Team meeting prior to the end of the contract period, we have only held planning meetings to date. The meetings have included two conference calls with the Steering Committee and State officials and one lunch-time discussion with Districts and State officials at the March 28th School StatNet meeting.

CONTACT INFORMATION

- Michael Ward, Director of Municipal Services at the Edward J. Collins, Jr. Center for Public Management, 617-287-4876, michael.ward@umb.edu
- Dr. Vince McKay, Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment, 617-625-6600, vmckay@k12.somerville.ma.us

REFERENCES

- All materials connected with School StatNet can be found at the project's blog.
- Note that for each School StatNet meeting, there are extensive materials prepared. StatNet analysis work with data submitted by districts or municipalities to create a summary of common/different practices and issues. However, it is our policy not to share these materials as they are intended to be working drafts and also to be reviewed in a somewhat confidential setting.

RESOURCES

See above.